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ABSTRACT

Educators who neglect to adapt teaching strategies to different cognitive styles may be placing some students at risk. A literature review suggests that elements of African American culture heavily influence African American students' communicative and cognitive styles. Research indicates that African American cultural values are organized around unique ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. Five characteristics are essential features of African American communicative style: (1) assertiveness; (2) forthrightness; (3) ethical awareness; (4) interpersonal responsiveness; and (5) group identification. African Americans tend to display elements of a field-dependent cognitive style that emphasizes holistic perception, verbal tasks, and an interpersonal orientation or social cognitive skills. Understanding cultural and cognitive differences should be especially important to educators, for if the educational system is oriented around field-independent cognitive styles, those who utilize field-dependent cognitive styles are placed at a severe disadvantage. As a starting point for a planned ethnographic study of African American cognitive styles, this review validates the evidence that diverse cultures and cognitive styles are key elements in educational success. (An appendix comparing cognitive styles and comparing the form and function of symbolic imagery between disparate cognitive processes is attached. Contains 37 references. (RS)

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Cultural Perspectives and Thinking: The African American Thinker in the Classroom

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This paper reviews literature that pertains to culture, communication, and cognitive style. There is a substantial amount of literature from a variety of disciplines that suggests culture heavily influences a persons learning style preferences. This literature springs from such diverse fields as anthropology, cognitive anthropology, cultural anthropology, psychology, cognitive psychology, and communication studies. Additionally, much of the literature in the field establishes the importance of recognizing the existence of diverse cultures and cognitive styles as key elements in the educational success. A growing body of literature suggests that communication faculty must look to generate and adapt curriculum in order to respond to increasingly multicultural student populations. African Americans are one cultural group that have gained the attention of many researchers. This literature review will focus on (1) African American culture, (2) African American communication styles, (3) African American cognitive styles, and (4) Implications of diverse cognitive styles in the classroom.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

According to Shade & Edwards (1987), culture "represents the collective consciousness of a community with its own unique customs, rituals, communication style, coping patterns, social organization, and childrearing attitudes and patterns" (p. 91). This definition is important because it illustrates the pervasive influence of culture on peoples values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau (1993) highlight the pervasive role of culture when they argue that "any person born into and socialized within a particular ethnic culture, for example mainstream U.S. culture, will be shaped by those experiences. Those ehtnocultural properties are likely to become part of that person's consciousness even if the

person leaves the ethnic culture and lives as an 'expatriate'" (p. 34). Much of the literature I reviewed points to the unique historical experience of African Americans in this country as an important part of their cultural development. Hale-Benson (1986) maintains that Afro-Americans have been so isolated in this country by slavery and other forms of discrimination that they have developed a "distinctive culture" (p. 18). Additionally, Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau (1993) contend that any discussion of African American culture must begin with recognition of an African history and consider the "complexities of life in a segregated America and the elements that fundamentally shape people's lives" (p. 14). In a similar vein, Shade (1982) claims the "general view of Afro-American culture is that it is a distinct pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting, which has developed as a way of adapting to color discrimination" (p. 220). This distinctive cultural experience is echoed in much of the literature on African American culture. White (1970) expands this analysis by claiming that "part of the objective situation of black persons in this society is a paranoid condition: there is a persecution, an irrational persecution, at that. Moreover, it is systematic" (p. 54). As a result of a unique history in this country, African Americans have developed a worldview to help them cope in a hostile cultural environment. Myers (1987) defines the African American worldview as a "view concerned with metaphysical rather than purely physical interrelationships, such as that between music and poetry, religious functions and practice, man and nature" (p. 74). These cultural influences have lead to the development of ontological, epistimemological, and axiological assumptions about the world that differ substantially from dominant American culture. Myers (1987) outlines the assumptions of the African worldview in the following terms:

> Ontologically, the nature of reality is believed to be at once spiritual and and material (spiritual/material, extrasensory as can be known through the five senses). Self-knowledge becomes the basis of all knowledge in Afrocentric epistemology and one knows through symbolic imagery and rhythm. In terms of axiology, highest value is placed on interpersonal relationships among people. Diunital (union of opposites) logic dominates this worldview and the process is ntuology (all sets are inter-related through human and spiritual networks) (p. 74).

It is important to note the philosophical assumptions of any culture under study because these assumptions guide the behaviors and thinking of the members of that culture. It should be apparent that the African American cultural network is a complex system heavily influenced by a history of discrimination and injustice. As Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau (1993) explain, "African American life, social structure, and identity have always reflected the complexity of a people caught in a cultural chasm" (p. 5).

While it is important to recognize the unique cultural attributes of African Americans, it is equally important to consider that the assumptions of their culture are not necessarily mutually exclusive with those of dominant American society. Torrance (1990) examined the relationship between African Americans and the American ethos. The aim of this study was to determine if blacks support fundamental ideals of economic individualism to the same extent as whites. Torrance (1990) constructed questionnaires to survey 100 students at Southern University. The questionnaires consisted of 20 questions designed to measure the following four concepts: "Black consciousness, awareness of discrimination, support for economic individualism, and support for equality of opportunity" (p. 76). Additionally, two hypotheses were developed to guide this research. The first hypothesis addressed the relationship between "awareness of discrimination, feelings of Black consciousness, and support for economic individualism" (p. 77). The second hypothesis concerned the

relationship between "awareness of discrimination, Black consciousness and equality of opportunity: that is, the feeling that the system should guarantee all its citizens an equal chance to succeed" (p. 78). Torrance (1990) found that those who indicated high levels of Black consciousness also indicated support for economic individualism. Thus, the results seemed to confirm the first hypothesis. Additionally, the study indicated that those who scored low on awareness of discrimination and low on measures of Black consciousness did not indicate high support for economic individualism. Torrance (1990) claims that the results of this study substantiate her argument that Blacks who display high levels of consciousness and awareness of discrimination see economic individualism as a way to improve their situation. This study seems to point to some of the critical components of African American culture highlighted above. Many African Americans display a high awareness of discrimination as well as a high level of Black consciousness. Additionally, this study suggests that there is potential common cultural ground between African Americans and the dominate American culture (i.e., values like economic individualism).

African American culture is a unique construct influenced by a history of discrimination and oppression. Understanding the nature of culture is essential in discovering the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of any group. In the following sections of this paper, I will focus on literature which illustrates the role of African American culture in communication and cognitive style.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNICATIVE STYLE

While my primary concern is with African American cognitive styles, an examination of the literature on African American communicative styles illustrates critical ways in which

their culture manifests itself. Additionally, this body of research reveals the essential link between culture, communication, and cognition. Barnlund (1991) defines communicative style as "the topics people prefer to discuss, their favorite forms of interaction-ritual, repartee, argument, self-disclosure-and the depth of involvement they demand of each other" (p. 27). This definition helps to frame the following discussion of communicative style.

Foeman & Pressley (1987) discuss the ways in which black interpersonal skills can be utilized in corporate culture. This discussion involves important categories of African American culture and language. Foeman and Pressley (1987) list the following as key African American cultural values: (1) Assertiveness, (2) Forthrightness, (3) Ethical awareness, (4) Interpersonal responsiveness, and (5) Group identification.

ASSERTIVENESS

The authors claim that black individuals attempt to draw attention to their "positive qualities or sense of individual power in a bold and unselfconsciousness manner" (p. 296). Foeman & Pressley (1987) insist that successful African American businesspeople employ extroverted interpersonal skills to attract "positive attention not only to the competent individual but to the organization as well" (p. 297).

FORTHRIGHTNESS

Foeman & Pressley (1987) declare that many blacks utilize a straightforward approach to problem solving. The authors also note that black managers are likely to be aggressive in bringing all important issues up for public discussion.

ETHICAL AWARENESS

According to Foeman & Pressley (1987), African Americans' forthright style is effective

partially because it is strongly linked to a human-directed system of ethics. Sullivan (1993) notes the importance of human experience for African Americans by arguing that "the ability of the leader in this African-American oral tradition hinges on her or his capacity to relate knowledge to human experiences" (p. 7). Sullivan (1993) bases her claims on a case study of Jesse Jacksons's 1988 Democratic Convention speech "Common Ground and Common Sense." Sullivan (1993) also claims that communication scholars must go beyond traditional white standards for communication in order to understand unique communicative styles utilized by African Americans. In addition, Foeman & Pressley (1987) state that "black people, in general, have maintained a belief in an overall balance of good and evil in the world" (p. 298). Foeman & Pressley (1987) conclude that black managers are uniquely able to inject a sense of ethics into the work environment.

INTERPERSONAL RESPONSIVENESS

Foeman & Pressley (1987) also describe African Americans as active communicators. They state that black "listeners are likely to actively respond to a speaker both verbally and physically" (p. 299). According to the authors, this orientation to interpersonal responsiveness adds to the ability of African Americans to contribute to organizational discourse.

GROUP IDENTIFICATION

The final cultural category of African Americans discussed by Foeman & Pressley (1987) is group identification. Their analysis suggests that many blacks express a tendency to orient themselves to the group which is consistent with all of the other values discussed earlier. The authors reveal that the "communal strength of the black culture is often seen functioning to

mediate the negative impact of many inevitable outside pressures on black individuals" (p. 300).

LANGUAGE

In addition to their analysis of African American cultural categories, Foeman & Pressley (1987) discuss black language styles. They argue that "blacks display their cultural heritage in their unique use of language" (p. 300). Many authors have commented on African American language patterns. Like Foeman & Pressley (1987), Weber (1991) also claims that African Americans utilize a unique language as a means of cultural preservation and expression. Weber (1991) states that the use of "black language is the black man's defiance of white America's total indoctrination. The use of black language by choice is a reflection not of a lack of intelligence, but of a desire to retain and preserve black life styles" (p. 282). Foeman & Pressley (1987) present compelling arguments regarding black cultural influences and language styles. Although their research is directed at an examination of the positive impacts of blacks on the organizational environment, they provide useful insight into African American communicative style.

Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts (1989) have also pursued research in the area of African American communication. These authors conducted studies to examine how blacks perceive interethnic communication with whites. In one study, the authors utilized a respondent group that was composed of 31 African Americans from a large, introductory speech communication course at a university in the southwestern United States (p. 390). In this study, the authors issued questionnaires which asked respondents to identify conversations they had with members of different ethnic groups. The goal of this research was to

determine what conversational strategies African Americans typically employ to improve or manage discourse with whites. They identified five such strategies: "Asserting a Point of View, Open-mindedness, Avoidance, Interaction Management, and Other-Orientation" (p. 395). The authors conducted a total of four different studies to develop a better understanding of interethnic communication. They conclude that African Americans tend to adapt unique styles of communication in their interactions with whites. This research helps to identify potential starting points for improving interethnic communication by outlining differences between black and white communicative styles. Also, by presenting an African American perspective on interethnic communication, the study "reflects the reality of being African American, a product of an ethnic cultural background and pressures to assimilate into the American mainstream" (p. 407). As I mentioned before, research in the area of African American communication styles illustrates ways in which their culture manifests itself.

Kochman (1981) utilized ethnographic methods to investigate the influence of cognition and culture on black and white styles of communication. According to Kochman (1981), African American culture emphasizes "individual self-assertion and self-expression, spiritual well-being, spontaneity and emotional expressiveness, personal (as opposed to status) orientation, individual distinctiveness, forthrightness, camaraderie, and community" (p. 5). These characteristics are congruous with the typology of African American communicative styles described by Foeman & Pressley (1987). Kochman's (1981) study revealed ways such styles manifest themselves in communication events. For example, Kochman (1981) argues that African Americans "feel that all views expressed and actions taken derive from a central set of core beliefs that cannot be other than personal" (p.23). This interpersonal orientation

is often evident in speaking situations. Kochman (1981) clarifies this point by stating that "blacks present their views as advocates. They take a position and show that they care about this position. This stance is characteristic of the mode of predominantly oral cultures like that of present-day black community people and white society of an earlier era" (p.20-21). This analysis illustrates ways in which cultural traditions, attitudes, values, and beliefs influence communicative behaviors. In the next section of this paper, I will review literature pertaining to cognitive style.

COGNITIVE STYLE

There exists a diverse body of literature on cognitive style that springs from a number of disciplines including anthropology, cultural anthropology, psychology, cognitive psychology, and communication. In this section, I attempt to review a portion of this research to develop a better understanding of cognitive styles.

As the literature reviewed previously indicates, culture has a pervasive influence on the way people behave and think. Much of the literature I reviewed indicates that culture influences the cognitive styles of individuals. Goldstein & Blackman (1978) define cognitive style as a "hypothetical construct that has been developed to explain the process of mediation between stimuli and responses. The term cognitive style refers to the characteristic ways in which individuals conceptually organize their environment" (p. 2). Those who examine cognitive styles from a cross-cultural perspective are particularly interested in how culture mediates specific cognitive processes. Lieberman (1991) defines cognitive processes as the "universal cerebral means employed to handle a specific task or problem at hand" (p. 229). According to Anderson (1988), it is possible that "different ethnic groups with different

cultural histories, different adaptive approaches to reality, and different socialization practices would differ concerning their respective cognitive/learning styles" (p. 4). The next section of this paper is devoted to a review of the literature concerning different theoretical approaches to cognitive styles.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF COGNITION

As I mentioned before, there is a substantial amount of literature from a number of different academic disciplines regarding cognitive styles. Goldstein & Blackman (1978) list the following as predominant theoretical approaches to the study of cognitive style: (1) Authoritarianism, rigidity, and intolerance of ambiguity, (2) Dogmatism, (3) Personal constructs and cognitive complexity, (4) Integrative complexity, and (5) Field dependence.

AUTHORITARIANISM

According to Goldstein & Blackman (1978), this approach was developed by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950). These researchers were interested in the "individual whose structure of thinking was expected to make him especially susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda" (p. 12). Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford confronted this topic by studying such issues as anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism.

DOGMATISM

The second approach to cognitive style discussed by Goldstein & Blackman (1978) is dogmatism. This theory was initially developed by Rokeach. Goldstein & Blackman (1978) explain that this "work represents efforts to develop a structurally-based measure of authoritarianism to replace the content-based measure developed by Adorno and his colleagues" (p. 13).

COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

Goldstein & Blackman (1978) claim that in this approach the "investigators are concerned with psychological dimensions that individuals use to structure their environment" (p. 13). Primary research in this area was conducted by Kelly (1955) and Bieri (1966).

INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

The fourth approach considered is integrative complexity. In this section, Goldstein & Blackman (1978) focus on the work of Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder (1961). According to Goldstein & Blackman, Harvey and his associates used a sentence-completion method to "assess the differentiation and integration involved in information processing" (p. 13).

FIELD DEPENDENCE

The final theoretical approach to cognitive style reviewed by Goldstein & Blackman (1978) is field dependence. They claim that this theory was developed by Witkin, Lewis, Hertzman, Machover, Meissner, & Wapner (1954). The field dependence approach examines cognitive style in relation to various perceptual domains. Additionally, this approach to the study of cognitive styles examines the interpersonal orientation of individuals.

This area has been the focus of many researchers interested in the influence of culture on cognition. Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua (1988) clarify this approach by stating that "thought based on increased differentiation is field independent, while thought based on lower levels of differentiation is field dependent. Field independence, therefore, involves differentiated and analytical thinking, rather than diffuse and global thinking" (p. 150). Banks (1988) advances this analysis by stating that "field independent learners prefer to work independently, while field-sensitive learners like to work with others to achieve a common

goal. Field-independent learners tend to be task-oriented and inattentive to their social environment when working" (p. 459). While many researchers use the terms field independence and field dependence, some also refer to the same cognitive styles as holistic and analytic or relational and analytic. According to Cooper (1980), "the holistic thinker relates to the environment as a whole; the analytic thinker focuses on part of a field as discrete from its surroundings. The holistic thinker is socially oriented; the analytic thinker is task-oriented. The two types of thinkers differ in what they attend to, in what is important to them" (p. 45). Witkin (1978) explains the interpersonal orientation of field-dependent individuals by stating that "field-dependent people, on the other hand, having less access to internal referents, are, in general, more likely to have recourse to external sources of information which may be helpful to them in acts of structuring. People are obviously the most common source of such information" (p. 17).

Cohen (1969) summarizes research initiated in 1963 at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. This research centered around the conceptual styles of low-income school children. According to Cohen (1969), the research involved the analysis of the "cognitive requirements of the school and their derivative social and psychological behaviors and those learning characteristics brought to the school by children from low-income homes" (p. 828). The children were administered widely used standardized tests of intelligence to enable the researchers to "identify the generic requirements for achievement that such instruments make of the people to whom they are administered" (p. 829). The results of this research confirmed the existence of relational and analytic cognitive styles. Cohen (1969) states that "two conceptual styles have been identified

and demonstrated reliably-relational and analytic. Relational and analytic conceptual styles were found to be associated with shared-function and formal primary-group participation, respectively, as socialization settings" (p. 842). This research helps to clarify and confirm the existence of different ways of thinking. In the next section, I will review literature that refers to the unique characteristics of African American cognitive styles.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COGNITIVE STYLE

The literature I reviewed indicates that African American culture facilitates the development of field dependent cognitive styles. Hale-Benson (1982) articulates the influence of culture on cognition by stating that "Afro-Americans participate in a culture that has its roots in West Africa. This culture gives rise to distinctive modes of child-rearing among African-American people. As a result, Black children may have distinctive learning and expressive styles that can be observed in their play behavior" (p. 5). In an article in which she reviews research on African American cognitive styles, Shade (1982) concludes that a "pattern seems to emerge that suggests that Afro-Americans have a field-dependent cognitive style" (p. 227). Jones (1978) investigated the meaning of black and white personality differences. In this study, Jones (1978) administered items obtained from the MMPI, California Psychological Inventory, and Embedded Figures Test to a group of 226 black and white junior college students. These psychological inventories were designed to test the personality characteristics of the respondents. In this study, Jones (1978) found that "further evidence for Black-White differences in personality processes is the greater field-dependence of Black subjects. The disparity in field-dependence-independence between the two races in this study surpasses the by now well established and predictable finding of sex differences in

cognitive style" (p. 250). Anderson (1988) also argues that cognitive styles employed by African Americans are likely to be holistic or field dependent. Many scholars claim that such an orientation originates in the African American worldview. According to Anderson (1988), "the most characteristic feature of the African philosophical system is its focus on unity and connection; it is a view of extraordinary harmony" (p. 5). Similarly, Hale-Benson (1982) notes that "aspects of African and Afro-American culture have been described as organized in a circular fashion in contrast to the linear organization of Western culture" (p. 40). These authors clearly indicate the existence of a unique cognitive couched in the African American experience. White (1970) also claims "that people who grow up in the black community tend to be much more intuitive in terms of their response to signs and gestures than they are in relating to the concrete syntax" (p. 56). All of these authors offer evidence to delineate specific aspect of African American cognitive style. Many authors also claim that because African Americans are socialized in a culture that stresses interpersonal responsiveness, they tend to develop social cognitive skills. According to Shade (1982), "an examination of the culture or lifestyle and world view of Afro-Americans, however, portrays strategies designed to foster survival and therefore tends to be rather universalistic, intuitive, and, more than that, very person-oriented" (p. 238) Additonally, Witkin (1978) argues that "field-dependent people have what may be characterized, overall, as an interpersonal orientation. That orientation has a number of ingredients, in regard to which it contrasts with the impersonal orientation of field-independent people" (p. 20). Shade (1982) states further that "Afro-Americans seem to develop a unique affective or personal orientation that manifests itself in attention to social cues, subjective meanings attached to words, preference for social distance,

and sustained use of nonverbal communication" (p. 221). In a similar vein, Shade & Edwards (1987) claim "that Afro-American children, because of the urban environment and social milieu in which they live and because of the various mediating experiences to which they are exposed, develop a preference for the social rather than the inanimate aspects of their environment which influence their school behavior" (p. 89). According to Madhere (1989), "when it comes to the empathic process, the leading tendency among Blacks seems to be interactive, not attributive. In other words, Blacks form their impressions mainly in terms of the elements present in a situation. The interactive modality affords them great flexibility in managing social encounters" (p. 200). More research needs to be conducted to determine the pervasiveness of African American cognitive styles. In addition, researchers should examine the link between cognitive style and educational success.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

One of the primary reasons for my interest in African American cognitive styles is education. Educational environments must be sensitive to a diverse collection of learning/cognitive styles. According to Ramirez (1973), "culturally unique learning styles represent a critical variable in the education of the culturally different" (p. 896). Kalbfleisch & Davies (1991) argue that African American participation in higher education is declining (p. 266). In additional, they claim that "if universities are to become true multicultural environments, then encouragement of black participation is vital to this goal" (p. 266). Several scholars also claim that the university climate must be modified to account for different cognitive styles. Koester & Lustig (1991) claim that "the preferred approach to structuring messages, supporting ideas, and presenting research findings is embedded within a

culture's patterns of thought about what constitutes effective reasoning" (p. 251). Additionally, they argue that because culture influences preferred communicative and cognitive styles, communication studies departments specifically must be prepared to account for cultural diversity. It also important for educators to recognize that while African American students tend to utilize holistic or field-dependent cognitive styles, school environments typically encourage analytical or field-independent cognitive styles. According to Cooper (1980), "in general the school environment rewards analytic thinkers; indeed, it expects students to be task-oriented and analytic in their approach to learning" (p. 45). Shade (1982) establishes the educational implications of such a learning atmosphere for African Americans by stating that "it seems very possible that the differences in performance which relate to the school context and which continue to be found are the result of a culturally induced difference in Afro-American cognitive or perceptual style preference which emphasizes a person rather than an object orientation" (p. 236). It seems logical that African American students who exercise field-dependent cognitive styles could be at risk in rigid or "hostile" learning situations. In fact, Anderson (1988) contends that "a different set of understandings about the way diverse populations communicate, behave, and think needs to be developed by educators. Until this occurs, education will continue to stagnate in the dark ages and educators will provide lip service rather than action to the egalitarian values associated with pluralism and multi-culturalism" (p. 8). Banks (1988) asserts that educators "should use a variety of teaching styles and content that will appeal to diverse students. Concepts should be taught when possible with different strategies so that students who are relational in their learning styles as well as those who are analytic will have an equal

opportunity to learn" (p. 466). This literature clearly indicates that educators must be conscious of diverse cognitive styles in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The literature I reviewed suggests that elements of African American culture heavily influence their communicative and cognitive styles. Research seems to indicate that African American cultural values are organized around unique ontological, epistimelogical, and axiological assumptions (Myers, 1987). Researchers should recognize the influence of African American cultural traditions on cognitive style. The African American worldview tempers their perception of the environment. Given the dramatic history of slavery and racism African Americans have had to endure in this country, it should come as no suprise that African Americans think differently about the world. It follows that understanding the nature of predominant African American cultural values is essential in developing an appreciation of their communicative and cognitive styles. As mentioned previously, I reviwed literature regarding African American communicative style because aspects of their cultural traditions and cognitive styles manifest themselves clearly in such behaviors. For example, Foeman & Pressley (1987) outlined the following five characteristics as essential features of African American communicative style: (1) Assertiveness, (2) Forthrightness, (3) Ethical awareness, (4) Interpersonal responsiveness, and (5) Group identification. These facets of communicative style match the ontological, epistemological, and axiological postulates of African American culture described by Myers (1987). Finally, components of African American culture can also be seen in their cognitive styles. As Shade (1982) noted, African Americans tend to display elements of a field-dependent cognitive style. According

to Witkin (1978), field-dependent cognitive styles emphasize holistic perception, verbal tasks, and an interpersonal orientation or social cognitive skills. Many scholars have attempted to demonstrate that African Americans typically employ field-dependent cognitive styles (Anderson, 1988; Banks, 1988; Cohen, 1969; Cooper, 1980; Hale-Benson, 1986; Jones, 1978; Shade, 1982).

Understanding cultural and cognitive differences should be especially important to educators. As Shade (1982) suggests, "the available evidence could lead to the conclusion that the difference in school success is attributable to the use of sociocentric, field-dependent, nonanalytic categorizing information processing strategies by many Afro-Americans" (p. 233). Shade (1982) highlights a critical concern for all interested in education; if the educational system is oriented around field-independent cognitive styles, those who utilize field-dependent cognitive styles are placed at a severe disadvantage. Cohen (1969) found that educational environments in this country characteristically favor field-independent learning styles. Educators who neglect to adapt teaching strategies to different cognitive styles may be placing some students at risk. According to Cooper (1980), teachers must learn to recognize unique cognitive styles and "they must be made aware that such a feature comes about as students attempt to move to an educated style. Only with such awareness can the teachers adopt the method that will best suit the individual students" (p. 49). Furthermore, Ramirez (1973) claims that "educational programs which are not based on the unique learning styles of the people they serve do not provide culturally relevant learning environments and are culturally undemocratic" (p. 897). Finally, the intention of this paper is not to develop or reinforce societal stereotypes of any group. I agree with Shade (1982) who claims that

"unlike the deficit theory approaches, which blame the victim for lack of success, the focus of a stylistic approach to learning requires the identification of diversity within the education setting" (p. 238). This approach simply suggests that we must be aware of cultural diversity in the classroom. This literature review should provide good starting point for my own research on African American cognitive styles. I will employ ethnographic methods in my research. Specifically, I will observe and interview African Americans in area high schools. Interviews with individuals will include the following topics: (1) Means of analyzing topics and issues, (2) Ways of interpreting complex arguments, and (3) Relationships between culture and cognitive styles. In addition, the open-ended and in-depth approach will result in pursuing topics that the subjects initiate.

Appendix A:

Cognitive Style Comparison

Field-Dependent *Relational/Holistic* *Affective*	*Field-Independent* *Analytic* *Non-Affective*
CHARACTERISTICS	**CHARACTERISTICS**
1. Perceive elements as a part of a total picture.	1. Perceive elements as discrete from their background.
2. Do best on verbal tasks.	2. Do best on analytic tasks.
3. Learn material which has a human social content and which is characterized by fantasy and humor.	3. Learn material that is inanimate and and impersonal more easily.
4. Performance influenced by authorizing figure's expression of confidence or doubt.	4. Performance not greatly affected by by the opinions of others.
5. Style conflicts with traditional school environment.	5. Style matches up with most school environments.

Comparison of Form and Function of Symbolic Imagery Between Disparate Cognitive Processes (Speech & Writing)

NON-WESTERN	WESTERN
1. Visual (pictorial thinking)	1. Notions or theoretical statements
2. Thought is perceived as. . .living thing, holistic thing, doing thing	2. Thought is. . .Mentalistic, devitalized, static
3. Imagery is intensely affective with cultural base	3. Imagery minimizes affective associations
4. Extensive expression of concrete emotional words and heightened use of metaphors	4. De-emphasis on such unless in specialized disciplines or situations
5. Medium is the message	5. Medium communicates the message
6. Medium motivates and socializes	6. Things must be contemplated before they motivate
7. Introduces self into objective analysis of events	7. Removes self

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